



Narratives of the Dead: Corpses and Bodies in the Works of Clough, Dickens, and Conrad

Ölülerin Anlatıları: Clough, Dickens ve Conrad'ın Eserlerinde Cesetler ve Bedenler

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Abstract

Horrific and visceral elements such as death, corpses, and grotesque details are the materials that many authors occasionally utilize in various ways in their works. While some writers use figurative or euphemistic language to express the bleak realities of death, murder, and violence, others adopt a direct and realistic style, graphically depicting such scenes. This study surveys narratives of death and murder in literature. It compares the works of three English authors: Arthur Hugh Clough's "Amours de Voyage," Charles Dickens's "The Uncommercial Traveller," and Joseph Conrad's *Secret Agent*. The lifeless body in literature reflects a society's broader cultural and existential concerns, which literary works both reflect and reinterpret. The literary representations of death, corpses, and murder are an intersection where history, cultural studies, and literature meet. The ways in which writers represent dead bodies and death vary according to their historical periods and cultural contexts. With this representation, literature seeks

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to answer fundamental questions about death, murder, the body, presence, and the material and metaphysical human body. In conclusion, it is stated that the undesired scenes of murder, death, corpses, and mutilated bodies in the works of Dickens and Conrad are represented with great detail and utmost realism. They present death as perceived by the people and the culture during their active years: cold and motionless. On the other hand, Clough allows his main character to play the role of a meek, ironic gentleman who appears to have never witnessed murder, raid, death, or violence. Clough has him go through horrible events, but he consoles him by bypassing awful scenes and inducing forgetfulness.

Keywords: *corpses, narration, death, Clough, Dickens, Conrad.*

Öz

Yazarlar eserlerinde ölüm, cesetler ve ürkütücü detaylar gibi korkunç ve dehşet verici sahne ve kısımları çeşitli yöntemlerle resmetmişlerdir. Bazı yazarlar ölüm, cinayet ve şiddetin kasvetli gerçeklerini ifade etmek için mecazi veya örtülü bir dil kullanırken, diğerleri bu tür bölümleri açıkça anlatarak doğrudan ve gerçekçi bir üslup kullanırlar. Bu makale, edebiyatta ölüm ve cinayet anlatılarını üç İngiliz yazarın şu eserlerini karşılaştırarak incelemektedir: Arthur Hugh Clough'ın "Amours de Voyage", Charles Dickens'in "The Uncommercial Traveler" ve Joseph Conrad'ın *Secret Agent*. Edebi eserlerde ölüm, ölümler ve cansız bedenler, içerisinde üretilen toplumun kültürel ve varoluşsal kaygılarını yansıtır. Ölüm, ceset ve cinayetin edebi temsilleri tarih, kültürel çalışmalar ve edebiyatın bulunduğu bir kesişme noktasıdır. Yazarların ölü bedeni ve ölümü temsil etme biçimleri eserlerindeki bağlamlara ve tarihsel dönemlere göre değişir. Bu temsiller ile yazarlar, ölüm, cinayet, beden, varlık, maddi ve metafizik insan bedeni hakkındaki temel ve esaslı sorulara cevap vermeye çalışıp bu konuyu irdelemişlerdir. Sonuç olarak, Dickens ve Conrad'ın eserlerinde ilgilenilmesi zor olan cinayet, ölüm, ceset ve parçalanmış beden anlatılarının büyük bir ayrıntı ve son derece gerçekçilikle resmettikleri ifade edilmiştir. Bu iki yazar ölümü, bulundukları dönemdeki insanlar ve kültür tarafından algılandığı şekliyle yani soğuk ve hareketsiz olarak betimlerler. Öte yandan Clough, ana karakterinin cinayet, baskın, ölüm ya da şiddete hiç tanık olmamış gibi görünen uysal, ironik bir beyefendi rolüne büründürür. Clough karakterine korkunç olaylar yaşatır ama bu sahneleri görmemiş gibi atlayarak ve unutkanlık gibi göstererek onu teselli eder.

Anahtar sözcükler: *ceset, anlatı, ölüm, Clough, Dickens, Conrad.*

Introduction

Literature has long been fascinated by death, dead bodies, and corpses within the context of cultural aspirations. Since ancient times, the corpse has been regarded as a sign of presence and absence in life, this world, and the aftermath. In modern critical theories, as presented in Katherine Verdery's *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* and Andrew Linklater's *Violence and Civilization in the Western World*, the corpse is not only a physical object but also a conduit for cultural anxieties, traumas, and even the ideologies of a nation (Verdery, 1999: 27–31; Linklater, 2021: 48). Literary studies also have mentioned death and corpses through mortality, violence, national identity, and historical change (Aries, 1981; Nead, 1996). Therefore, the literary representations of death, corpses, and violence serve as cultural reflections and narrative devices through which authors express larger theoretical matters

about life and the human condition. These literary works span different historical periods and genres, yet they depict violent scenes, corpses, and death. Taken together, these textual examples exemplify the ever-changing traditional meanings of the dead body across national literary writings.

A contradictory fascination with mortality marked the Victorian period. Public executions and reports of violent crime coexisted with new sentimental discourses of respectable death (Jalland, 1996). The age witnessed “urban transformation, overcrowding, epidemics, and poverty,” which led to the production of literary texts filled with anonymous bodies, neglected corpses, and public security anxieties (Wohl, 1977: 207–211). In the following century, chaos, turmoil, political violence, and terrorism became public concerns. While some writers skip the grotesque and horrid narrative details of murder, death, mutilation, and other lethal acts in their stories, some choose to weigh in on them and give a detailed account of the scenes that many readers may find revolting and irritating. Some writers do not escape this challenging task and write it in detail for narrative or imagery purposes, while others use euphemisms and indirect ways to talk about death and corpses. These writers’ attitudes towards this issue vary, including those of Charles Dickens, Arthur Hugh Clough, and Joseph Conrad. In his poem *Amours de Voyage*, Clough prefers to describe these moments of death, murder, and grotesque imagery symbolically, or to cloak them with more tranquil words and images. Such writers are consciously aware that there is death, violence, and war in life, and they acknowledge that human bodies will eventually be torn apart, or the bodies will become corpses that are excruciatingly hard to steal a glance at, though they choose to cover these moments with indirect narration or symbols. Because of their characteristics, style, or the belief that this technique would be more powerful on the reader, they choose to convey their imaginary world of death and the cruelties of humans or nature in a subtle, undercover way. On the other hand, Dickens, in his *The Uncommercial Traveller*; and Conrad, in his *The Secret Agent*, seem to openly and explicitly describe and narrate these human truths, generally perceived as disturbing and awful, as clearly and directly as possible. They are extremely realistic in depicting death, murder, and other details, as Dickens narrates social issues as they are, and Conrad also takes a direct, detailed approach to human nature and horrific scenes. Are they teaching a lesson or getting pleasure from writing and selling the misery of death? The answer to this question is given by Margaret Atwood, as she declared on the issue of torturing and mutilating women’s bodies in *The Handmaid’s Tale*: “Going with this sad and mutilated story because, after all, I want you to hear it. By telling you anything at all, I’m at least believing in you [...] Because I’m telling you this story, I will your existence. I tell therefore you are” (1998: 244).

The selection of Clough’s *Amours de Voyage*, Dickens’s *The Uncommercial Traveller*, and Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* is based on the fact that these texts share historical common points in the Victorian and Late Victorian periods. The writing span of these three texts is marked by industrialization, colonial expansion, and philosophical concerns about security, social order, and human mortality. Therefore, themes of death, corpses, and violence were prevalent in the news, literature, and public discussions. Clough’s *Amours de Voyage* is a

story of romantic idealization and melancholy, set against the backdrop of the 1849 Roman Revolution. Dickens's *The Uncommercial Traveller* shares an analogous attitude, but through the lens of social problems in the metropolitan city of London, emphasizing urban neglect. In the text, Dickens offers blunt descriptions of funerals, infant deaths, and the materialization of the dead. His depiction of corpses is ethical, but he employs grotesque realism to illustrate social indifference. Conrad's *The Secret Agent* takes the depiction of death and corpses to a subsequent level, incorporating psychological dimensions. Thus, these three works were carefully chosen because each presents a historically meaningful confrontation with death. All three texts oppose the romanticizing of death. Instead, they focus on the human corpse as an upsetting presence that displays cracks in social order and individual psychology.

The narratives of death reflect and reveal the moral and social concerns and beliefs of the writers and the cultural period to which they belong. These narratives are not merely details or topics in stories but engage with more complex and extensive ontological and cultural debates and discussions. The symbolism, vocabulary, narrative style, and mood of the writers in depicting such scenes will bridge the gap between the physical and metaphysical understandings of death and other grotesque forms of death. Exploring the dead body matters religiously and ideologically in history and in cultures (Laqueur, 2016: 1); therefore, literature is deeply tied to the historical and cultural contexts in which these works were produced. According to James Gire (2014: 5), studying these cultural differences in perceptions of death and dying is crucial, as they greatly influence people's behaviours during life, their attitudes toward death, the presence or absence of fear surrounding it, and their funeral and mourning rituals. The Victorian era, as represented by Clough and Dickens, was characterized by an intense preoccupation with death, shaped by religious discourse and the urban experience: "Victorian writers and their French contemporaries were fascinated by good deaths and beautiful dead bodies" (Gilman, 2015: 155). Conversely, Conrad represents a transition to modern fragmentation, alienation, and the disintegration of traditional narratives while talking about the death or violent murder of his characters. In these varied settings, the portrayal of the dead body reflects evolving perspectives on death and what it means to be human as the aim of literary artistry. This paper examines the issues of death and the physical integrity of the human body in literature through a theoretical perspective on Victorian and Late Victorian narrative styles. It focuses on the culture of death and mutilation as grotesque details in Victorian culture, as the discussion underscores the importance of examining the narrative and symbolic functions of the dead body and mutilations after death in various ways in the selected works of Clough, Dickens, and Conrad.

A cultural approach is possible for the survey of death, corpses, and mutilated bodies in literature with an emphasis on cultural history and narrative traditions. The body as a physical object and material entity should be the primary concern of the study, while another should be how the writers perceived death, corpses, and violent death scenes. Any symbolic, metaphysical, or figurative language depicting such scenes in stories and novels carries deep meanings in the cultural and narrative structures. Julia Kristeva (1982) claimed that the corpse represents the ultimate abject, which is a site of horror and fascination that challenges

boundaries between self and other, life and death. Kristeva's concept of abjection presents a reflection on the instinctive and symbolic power of the dead body in literature. In addition to Kristeva's psychoanalytic approach, this study examines Victorian and Late Victorian cultural norms and the period's attitudes toward death and mourning. In her book *Death in the Victorian Family* (1996), Patricia Jalland examines 19th-century burial practices and public mourning, which shaped literary representations of death. These historical contexts are essential for understanding Dickens's depictions of urban venues of death and murder, as well as Clough's poetic euphemisms of mortality.

Clough is preoccupied with the transient nature of life and the horrid inevitability of death. The poem "*Amours de Voyage*" reflects Clough's doubtful and skeptical style. The literary representations of death and dead bodies in Clough's poetry are infused with a tension between the material and the spiritual, reflecting the Victorian crisis of faith. Regarding the crisis of faith and religious doubt in the second half of the Victorian Period, Walter E. Houghton (1957: 35) notes that Clough's ambivalence, expressed in his dogmatic and supercilious tone towards religious issues, is mirrored in his depiction of death as both a physical and a metaphysical phenomenon. The corpses and mutilated bodies, in this context, become a site of inquiry into the nature of human existence, serving as a reminder of mortality and the limitations of human understanding. In *Amours de Voyage*, for instance, the carnality of the human body is contrasted with the intellectual and emotional complex mentality of the persona, Claude. Clough's portrayal of death and the body engages in euphemistic, subtle narration of mortality in literature.

Ignoring death: Clough's *Amours de Voyage*

Clough was an English poet who sporadically used themes of uncertainty and the ominous disposition of the Victorian era. Concentrating on the realities of life in his writings, Clough struggled with the tension between ideals of heroic action and the mundane realities of domestic life and practical duties (Markovits, 2001: 452-56). Clough's poem *Amours de Voyage* reflects the aforementioned themes, blending the epic and realist traditions in a story of missed opportunities and failed romance. The poem portrays the unheroic lives of its protagonists, Claude and Mary. Their love story unfolds as a series of anticlimaxes, marked by indecision, miscommunication, and inaction, paralleling Clough's life struggles. Ultimately, the poem defies traditional epic expectations, ending not in triumph but in the lovers' separation and unfulfilled potential. This unresolved conclusion underscores Clough's preoccupation with the complexities and everyday constraints of modern life. Some critics (McEwen, 1967: 2) viewed Clough as a poet of doubt, perceiving the protagonist, Claude, as an indecisive reflection of Clough's character; therefore, the poem was dismissed to brief mentions in the back pages of anthologies and received little recognition as a work of significant merit.

Clough started composing *Amours de Voyage* in Rome in 1849, when it was attacked by the French army, which ended in casualties and death, resulting in depictions of death, murder, and massacre as witnessed by Clough. His persona is Claude, a tourist caught in

the middle of the siege, and he conveys his story and poem through this persona and letters. Claude typically refers to the casualties in the siege as martyrs to euphemize the horrific deaths of soldiers and also innocent civilians. According to Cora Lindsey, *Amours de Voyage* draws on Virgilian and Homeric epic traditions with its classical age setting, depiction of a siege, heroes, and Roman meters; however, the protagonist, Claude, contrasts with traditional epic heroes like Aeneas or Ulysses, lacking their heroism questioning the blind heroism of typical epic warriors (2017: 25). In a particularly striking moment of the poem, Claude recounts his unsettling thrill at witnessing a man being killed by an enraged crowd. However, he experiences this raw violence more as a detached observer than an involved participant, likening it to viewing a crowded museum exhibit with a guidebook in hand (Gray, 2004: 198). Reflecting on this detached perspective, he describes walking away and catching a glimpse of the victim's legs beneath the crowd's feet as he bent down:

So, I have seen a man killed! An experience that, among others!
Yes, I suppose I have; although I can hardly be certain,
And in a court of justice could never declare I had seen it.
But a man was killed, I am told, in a place where I saw
Something; a man was killed, I am told, and I saw something.
(Malhauser, 1974: 108)

In this extract, Clough extols an intuitive reaction to raid, murder, and violence, adopting a reflective, yet doubtful tone that highlights the tension between intuition and intellectual detachment. The lines show the poet's excitement at the anarchic scene of a human death. This rhythmic excitement mirrors the narrator's immediate, almost instinctive engagement with the event. The tone shifts to one of doubt and self-questioning. The narrator acknowledges the experience but tempers it with uncertainty, claiming he could never confidently testify to what he saw. By repeating the phrase "a man was killed, I am told" (1974: 108), the narrator emphasizes the gap between direct experience and mediated knowledge, highlighting the unreliable nature of perception and memory. Therefore, ambiguity and self-doubt are hallmarks of his Victorian context.

Death, corpses, bodies, and other grotesque details are found in the poem, with their emphasis on the descriptions of emotional aftermath, connecting to the dehumanizing effects of the city and the vulgarity of a civil rebellion and fight. One of these is found in lines 229 to 232, where the political violence in Rome is portrayed:

I saw a dead man borne along the street—
A ghastly sight, with blood upon his face;
And women screaming as they hurried by,
And children clinging to their mothers' gowns."
(Mulhauser, 1974: 180)

A dead man is seen by the persona, where the emphasis is put on the blood and the public reaction to this horrific sight. This is not one of the poet's meditations, but rather a portrayal of political chaos that culminates in a physical corpse. Here, the imagery of street riots and fighting is set. Moreover, not only corpses and death but also the suffering arising from them

are mentioned in the poem. In Canto III, Claude discusses a “poor wretched body” that has been given so much trouble that its effects are evident, conveying the human vulnerability in times of savagery, riots, and war (Mulhauser, 1974: 163). The bodies of dead men, women, and children are shown as meat that is doomed to decay with emotionless observations from the passersby. This reflects the Victorian anxieties about materialism and the vanity of the physical body bound to time and aging.

Associated with corpses, death, and motionless bodies, the metaphorical concept of death is also mentioned in the poem. The corpses are exposed during the revolution in Canto IV:

They lay all night unburied in the square—
The slain of yesterday; and none dared go
To give them burial; dogs came prowling near,
And women turned their faces from the show.”
(Mulhauser, 1974: 181)

This chapter intensely reminds us of the abandoned corpse as a symbol of social chaos, disorder, and breakdown. The refusal and inability to bury the dead bodies point to a descent into chaos, where bodies become sheer substance, exposed to rats, onlookers, and vultures. Throughout the poem, death is presented several times in metaphorical terms. Specifically, this is related to the loss of loved ones and the poet’s urge to abandon idealism in their life. In Canto V, after learning that his lover may have left Rome due to these chaos, Claude cries: “All’s over now; the dream is at an end/ The vision gone, and I am left alone. /What boots it now to strive, or hope, or plan? Life’s current seems to stagnate and to die” (Mulhauser, 1974: 190). Though no literal corpse appears here, the language of death, worded as “stagnate and to die,” is applied to an inner life and suggests a spiritual or emotional corpse of the persona after witnessing such acts. Nevertheless, not only the dead bodies but the live body is important in the poem, Claude wishes the live body of his lover with him, saying he thinks of her not as a “spirit pure, but as a woman with a hand, a voice, / A presence warm, with movements soft and sure” (Mulhauser, 1974: 148).

In her article, Isobel Armstrong suggests that Clough’s work stands out for his skillful use of ironic wit and epigrams, which he employed for his most profound aims with remarkable sharpness; he drew a sense of lyricism from the plainness of everyday language and shaped the rhythms of conversational speech to create a subtle, seemingly effortless eloquence (1982: 155). These traits define Clough’s poetry as unconventional, innovative, refined, and reflective, qualities unusual in Victorian poetry. Some writers consider Clough’s poem *Amours de Voyage* modern because of its frankness, irony, conversational texture, and mood play (Alexander, 2000: 268). On the other hand, Armstrong suggests that “however cutting its satire [it] is not a harsh poem” (1982: 163). In this respect, it can be argued that Clough exhibits some harshness, particularly in the brutal and horrifying war and skirmish scenes. This scene is found in canto II, part VII of *Amours de Voyage* (Mulhauser, 1974: 108-9). Claude, the protagonist, writes to Eustace about a scene they witnessed (he was traveling with an English family): a fight and a death. In these lines, Clough starts by accepting that he has seen a man killed. Still later, he becomes delusional, repeating confusing lines as if

he is not certain, cannot declare having seen it, or using the phrase “I suppose” (1974: 253), conveying uncertainty. His hesitation to describe the death of a man reaches in the lines: “But a man was killed, I am told, in a place where I saw/Something; a man was killed, I am told, and I saw something.”

Clough continues, stating that the crowd is dragging “something” in the middle of them and asks, “What is it?” Obviously, a corpse, a dead human being, is dragged because Claude is in the middle of a war, a rebellion. Subsequently, in lines 183-5, Clough conceals a scene of mutilation and attempts to depict it in a less hellish manner. In lines 174-7, there is a violent scene; a group of “stragglers” is executing a man and tearing him into pieces with their swords, then screaming and chanting. Words like “hewing” and “chopping,” though he asks, “At what?” He becomes sure of the blood on the swords and that someone is being lynched later. Clough conceals the scenes. His astonishment at seeing blood (“Is that blood...?”) is also a follow-up to his good manners. Several exclamations of surprise confirm John Schad as he says Clough saw the history as “shocking” (2006: 33). Although he is harsh against the antiquity of Rome (“RUBBISHY seems the word,” 1974: 95) or towards the French (“and glad that the Frenchmen were beaten,” 1974: 108), he is at least kind enough to feel sorry for the lynched or mutilated corpses that have suffered much.

As Claude resumes his walk in the middle of a war, so do his doubts and his surprise at the death and corpses. Clough paints him as a snobbish, audacious upper-class gentleman who acts as if he has never seen a dead body or attended a funeral. He replies, “No; -- I began to be doubtful” to the question, “You didn’t see the dead man?” (1974: 109). He seems to be trying to forget the scenes whenever he encounters them. In parallel to this indecisiveness, hesitancy, and action scarcity, Clough’s wife states that “[Clough’s intellect was naturally subject to] a certain inertia, a certain slowness of movement, [which] constantly made it hard for him to get over the initial difficulties of self-expression” (Markovits, 2001: 451). Schad (2010) correspondingly points out the process of thinking and doubting in the poem, as evidenced by lines that question Christian beliefs and faith, English abroad, and the city as a modern phenomenon and way of thinking. Next, Claude comes across a guard (Line 195) who slashes his head and breaks his sword. There is an obscurity here whether he slashes a man’s head or hits “a broad hat covered with dust” (1974: 109). Another diversion here covers the bloody, violent scene and leaves an impression on the minds. From the hat and the slashing, it can be deduced that there was a human head chopped off. Claude continues his unforgettable walk, then stoops to watch something between the legs of the people in the “hubbub.” In lines 197-9, he witnesses another mutilation. He uses wordplay to tell us the story: “Stooping, I saw through the legs of the people the legs of a body.” He sees the disjointed legs of a corpse and complains to Eustace that he cannot tell anyone but him. He considers these scenes so bloody that they should not be said to women. He even asks for Heaven’s help. Throughout the end of the part, Clough states that history is “Rumour of Rumours” (1974: 198) and that the deaths he has witnessed are part of it. Does that mean the things he saw are like rumours? Or are they rumours? Among the rumours, there are slaughters of people; a Priest stabs a guard and fires on sentinels. He leaves the decision to Eustace; however, what he sees proves

they are not just rumours. Clough looks for peace at the end of the part. He likes peace and struggles to forget the memories as he did before in Canto II part V (1974: 107), where he claims, “And on the walls, you read the first bulletin of the morning. -- /This is all that I saw, and all that I know of the battle.” Analyzing Clough’s style, which is akin to a tide that ebbs and flows, much like the memories he recalls and forgets, accepts and denies, we can discern the interplay of mood and complex texture, as Alexander suggests (1974: 268). Moreover, Schad picks up the line in which Clough summarizes the poem’s essence: “Yet may we think, and forget, and possess our souls in resistance” (Schad, 2010: 2). The kindness of Clough in his treatment of the vicious and devilish things around him and his desire to wipe them all out while thinking is conveyed by the chorus at the beginning of Canto III, lines 3-6 (1974: 114), which says:

Yet may we, thinking on these things, exclude what is meaner around us;
Yet, at the worst of the worst, books and a chamber remain;
Yet may we think, and forget, and possess our souls in resistance. --
Ah, but away from the stir, shouting, and gossip of war
(Malhauser, 1974: 114)

The application of this principle to other cases is also valid for the corpses and mutilating them. Clough tries not to mention them often and denies having seen them. Schad (2010: 2, 2006: 63-84) compiles some good expressive questions about this matter: “What does it mean to see a man killed? ...did the man whom Claude has just seen being killed *see* Claude seeing him being killed?” He questions Claude’s feelings about witnessing someone being killed. Schad answers this in Clough’s words: “Yes, as I walk... I can be and become anything that I meet with or look at.” That is, Clough feels the situation inside, like himself that is being killed, like his virginity of witnessing a death, his naivety and purity being corrupted. Clough’s position is best exemplified in these lines, where he says he does not want to act in murder, death, and such situations; it is dangerous, malpractice, illegitimate, and a “terrible notion of a duty”:

I do not like being moved, for the will is excited, and action
Is a most dangerous thing; I tremble for something factitious,
Some malpractice of heart and illegitimate process;
We are so prone to these things, with our terrible notions of duty.
(Malhauser, 1974: 111)

In conclusion, whether in the form of a mood play or an ironic style, Clough seems disturbed by violence to an excessive degree. Therefore, he writes like an absent-minded person, rejecting the things he has experienced. Maybe that part about “the butchery” in Rome – in which he seems sincere and sorrowful – should be exempted from his ironical, harsh, arrogant, and contemptuous style. Clough’s *Amours de Voyage* portrays Claude as a reflective yet hesitant observer of death and violence, illustrating his struggle to reconcile his intellectual detachment with the harsh realities of war. His encounters with mutilated bodies and acts of brutality evoke a tension between witnessing and forgetting as he attempts to shield himself and others from these graphic memories.

Master of backstreets and murder: *The Uncommercial Traveller*

“...Morgue. I never want to go there but am always pulled there,” pens Dickens in *The Uncommercial Traveller* about his reluctance to visit the dead (1896: 55). Furthermore, it is surveyed that one of his novels (*Bleak House*) is extravagant in that subject: “The novel is strewn with rotten corpses...and is so obsessed with” (Miller, 2001: 60). Dickens is insolent in the narration and depiction of death, dead and the horrifying scenes like that. Throughout his essay, *The Uncommercial Traveller*, it becomes clear that the narration of deaths and corpses is woven in occasionally. In one of the essays entitled *Travelling Abroad*, Dickens visits the Morgue in Paris on one Christmas Day. Confusingly, he remarks on his unwanted passion for the dead, “[instead of being] anywhere else, I was attracted in, to see an old grey man lying all alone on his cold bed, with a tap of water turned on over his grey hair, and running, drip, drip, drip, down his wretched face...” (1896: 55). Bianca Treddenick puts this story in context with the Paris morgue, which Dickens was familiar with (2010: 72). The next day, he loses his challenge with this instinct and returns to the sight. This time, Dickens witnesses a challenging experience, though he is unwilling to cover up what he saw, unlike Thomas and Clough. Dickens composes one of the most unbearable sights one could experience

I was pulled in again to look at a flaxen-haired boy of eighteen, with a heart hanging on his breast — ‘from his mother,’ was engraven on it — who had come into the net across the river, with a bullet wound in his fair forehead and his hands cut with a knife, but whence or how was a blank mystery (1896: 55)

Straightforward to read but demanding to think about and experience. Dickens vividly conveys his imagination to us without skipping a beat. Why would someone be such a realist? The answer can be traced to Dickens’s career as a reporter and journalist. After all, a journalist’s mission is to tell the truth directly. The mutilated corpse is a young male at eighteen; this boy was shot by his mother, his heart was ripped and wrapped like a gift, his hands were hacked, and the “from his mother” note implies that he will wait for them for a long time, because who will identify him more accurately than his mother. Engraving something on a heart should be difficult, though Dickens looks for the unique and the strange. In addition to this remark, Barbara Hardy supportively states that “Dickens has an eye for the odd particular, like the pink shell and the peacock feathers, which not only provides selective vividness and focus but conveys a precise sense of social ways and means” (1982: 44). Dickens is taking the advice of George Eliot, who recommends that “authors must submit to being something of monsters” (Eliot, 1954: 119). There is an ironic treatment of a corpse in the morgue. Dickens writes that the man’s corpse was “in a frightful manner comic” (1896: 55).

Dickens’s text engages in numerous discussions, thoughts, imagery, metaphors, and descriptions of death and bodies, portraying the public display of corpses in the morgue as both spectacle and social commentary. Moreover, in the following samples, Dickens treats children’s corpses, highlighting class differences, the elderly poor depicted as already dead while they are physically alive, urban nights, and backstreet sights. The first mentions of

death and corpses are in “The Morgue” chapter: “The bodies lie, each in its separate tray, on an inclined plane; and the water in which they were found, or with which they are supposed to have been connected, trickles from them down a gutter” (1896: 125). In the morgue, the traveller sees many bodies of all sexes and ages. Some of them are “disfigured; some calm and placid; some so young—oh, so young!” (126). This chapter in the story is where gothic features and social critique are blended. There are also child mortalities in the story. Dickens reports the funeral of a child, whose body is handled with minimal dignity: “The little body was laid in the ground with no more ceremony than the carcase of a dog” (161). The corpses of the children are commodified, pointing to Dickens’s classical themes of poverty and institutional neglect.

Another setting for corpses and death in Dickens is the workplace. In the chapter “Wapping Workhouse,” he visits a riverside workhouse where death is common: “I found myself among a company of old men, broken, worn-out, and cast aside, waiting only for the grave” (94), one of them is a “one grey-headed old creature, with a face like a death’s-head, sat mumbling by the fire, as if he were already half out of the world” (95). Though not related to corpses, the imagery links the poor with metaphorical death long before their physical death. The metropolitan and its perilous nights are also depicted in the story. Dickens narrates the city’s corpses, drunkards, the wretched: “I saw the dead and the dying, the sane and the mad, the real and the unreal, all jumbled together” (73). The bodies in the city are “so wasted, their eyes so sunk, their gaunt limbs so tremulous, that they seemed less like living men than spectres escaped from graves” (205). These metaphors and extracts robustly establish a claim about Dickens’s fixation on the dead body and corpses. He lists and describes mourning and burials to show how corpses are displayed and disposed of.

Regarding Dickens’ narrative style, Hardy Dickens masterfully layers visual experiences, presenting objects and places not as if they are being seen for the first time but as they are recalled through memory. These visuals carry the weight of remembrance, adding depth and complexity to the imagery. This approach brings the scenes to life and reflects the writing process, where past experiences shape and enrich images (1896: 44). Terms of this assertion can be practiced in his treatment of the corpses while Dickens continues his visits in Paris; he pays a visit to a crowded bath where he sees another corpse. Dickens tells the unavoidable effects of that experience when he tries to drink some water from the river:

... it turned me sick, for I fancied that the contamination of the creature was in it.

Of course, I knew perfectly well that the large dark creature was stone dead, and that I should no more come upon him out of the place where I had seen him dead, than I should come upon the cathedral of Notre-Dame in an entirely new situation. What troubled me was the picture of the creature; and that had so curiously and strongly painted itself upon my brain, that I could not get rid of it until it was worn out. (1896: 55)

The nightmare continues into the evening; Dickens “seizes and particularizes moments and movements” (1896: 56): “I noticed the peculiarities of this possession, while it was a real discomfort to me. That very day, at dinner, some morsel on my plate looked like a piece

of him...” The sickness lasts for a week, and the images revive themselves occasionally, Dickens writes. The nightmare continues into the evening, as Dickens vividly describes how specific details of his experience haunted him. He recalls even mistaking food on his plate for a piece of the disturbing vision. This discomfort lasted for a week, with the unsettling images recurring periodically.

In the Chapter *Some Recollections of Mortality*, Dickens reveals the public eye on the corpses, though that cannot be separated from his imagination. Therefore, it can be concluded that the points of view belong to Dickens, and they bear some essence from Dickens himself. He and a friend of his are in front of the Morgue glass, in which a variety of ownerless corpses wait for their possessors. The first thing that can be realized is Dickens’s eagerness, friends, and the public to see the “show.” Dickens states that the “scene” looked so interestingly like a business (1896: 165). Later, he writes about rethinking the issue: “Who would have thought of public fickleness even at the morgue? But there it was, on that occasion” (1896: 165). The first question that comes to their minds is the reason, the shape, and the way of the death and the corpse: “Was it river, pistol, knife, love, gambling, robbery, hatred, how many stabs, how many bullets, fresh or decomposed, suicide or murder?” (1896: 164). Dickens also mentions a few other perspectives of the public mind and opinion. He offers different perspectives on the corpses. Moreover, he also tells their common feature:

The uncommercial interest, sated at a glance... The differences in expression were not many. There was a little pity, but not much, and that mostly with a selfish touch in it — as who would say, ‘Shall I, poor I, look like that, when the time comes!’ There was more of a secretly brooding contemplation and curiosity, as ‘That man I don’t like, and have the grudge against; would such be his appearance, if some one — not to mention names — by any chance gave him an knock? There was a wolfish stare at the object, in which homicidal white-lead worker shone conspicuous. And there was a much more general, purposeless, vacant staring at it — like looking at waxwork, without a catalogue, and not knowing what to make of it. But all these expressions concurred in possessing the one underlying expression of *looking at something that could not return a look*. (1896: 166-167)

In *The Uncommercial Traveller*, some parts include other views on death, and the treatment of corpses is such; in *Some Recollections of Immortality*, the Traveller comes across a dead woman on his path. He sees two men who dragged the body out of the canal. One stares at the body, as if at a waxwork exhibition without a catalog, and the other looks over his stock with professional stiffness and coolness. In *Nurse’s Stories*, a cannibalistic murderer, Captain Murderer, is listed with an inhumane point of view toward the dead. His mission, Dickens says, is “matrimony, and the gratification of a cannibal appetite with tender brides” (1896: 131). In reply to a question about the flowers he decorated in the church, he says, “They are Garnish for house lamb.” In *The Shipwreck*, Dickens talks about a diver who leaves a corpse at the bottom of the sea instead of mutilating it.

The parts from Dickens’s book summarize people’s thoughts and instincts about corpses and death. As claimed, Dickens does not shy away from these realities of life and humankind.

The characteristics inside the writings of Dickens are summarised by Hardy, who analyses him as “a famous example of the wounded artist, whose sicknesses were shed in great art, whose very grudges against family and society linked him through personal pains with larger public sufferings” (1896: 41). In this paper, Dickens presents the corpses and the people in the city to shudder us inside or, as he says in *Pickwick Papers*, “to make [our] flesh creep” (1986: 180). In the light of these commentaries and illustrations, we can say that Dickens is brave or harsh enough to convey the reality of death as he saw it. Alan Shelston concludes briefly and bizarrely, “Dickens, in Eliot’s phrase, had a love for death” (2005: 77).

Conrad and the political horror: *The Secret Agent*

The Secret Agent, written by Conrad, sees the dead and the corpses through a political and metropolitan lens. As the book is about some anarchists and the scope of anarchy, there are certainly murders, explosions, deaths, and corpses. Regarding the book’s theme, Michael Newton states that the book is about “the physically grotesque, the weird, the deviant, the disappointed and the disappointing” (2007: xvii). The corpses and mutilated bodies, therefore, can be found in the text occasionally. One of the striking samples of such narration is when Stevie’s corpse is discovered. After the bombing in Greenwich, Stevie’s body is found in a shape so shockingly fragmented that its discovery could only be made by his clothing and a label pasted into his cloak:

The limbs, the feet, the hands, the head - there was nothing missing. But the head had been battered to a shapeless pulp... The only clue was the clothing, and a label with the boy’s name and address sewn into the collar of his overcoat. (2007: 156)

This piece stresses the horrific face of modern violence. A disabled and disadvantaged human, an innocent man, is shattered into pieces by a bomb he didn’t make, intend, or carry knowingly. His sister Winnie is devastated after the event. She sees the mutilated corpse of her brother in the mortuary (2007: 175) and realizes that one of the people responsible for this crime was her husband. She becomes sick at the sight of this disaster. Confrontations with corpses would never be easy.

The scenes of death and bodies are not limited to these, but what makes it more meaningful and painful is the depictions of the human tragedies that follow these deaths. In the morgue narratives of the story, Conrad portrays the grief and pain of relatives and friends, as well as the officials’ indifference to these scenes. In the narrative, Conrad says that the “attendants moved about with the stolidity of men to whom the horror of death had been reduced to a matter of routine” (2007: 157). The acts of violence and bloodshed have made the officials and the public dehumanized as a result of the process. The officials and the press treat Stevie’s corpse as a mere document and statistic while his sister is trembling with fear. With the circle of endless violence now, Winnie kills her husband, Verloc, in a state of delirium. The description of Verloc’s cold and stiff corpse is one of the striking moments of the story in the context of death, corpses, and the grotesque: “He lay very still, with his head turned slightly on the carpet... One arm was stretched out as if reaching for something, and his eyes stared wide open at the ceiling” (2007: 197). This is a pitiful scene of the death of

a conspirator who just lies like a lifeless object, which gives the reader a final realization. Conrad aims at showing the dehumanizing effects of violence, the disconnection between the public and the individual, moral decay, as well as emotional numbness that features a chaotic and meaningless world. The human body is fragile, and death is near. The bodies are reduced to physical objects or just meat. These views are conveyed through Chief Inspector Heat's dialogues. He states that a man torn to pieces after a bombing is not a man anymore; he is "a collection of fragments requiring inventory." (2007: 155). Only evidence remains from the body of a human.

One issue about the novel in terms of relevance to reflecting the social and political problems of the age is the use of disabled characters as victims of society and their usage as tools for murder and bombing. The character used for this function is Stevie. Ayla Oğuz, in her essay "Stigma as a Means of Social Oppression in Disabled Individuals: The Secret Agent", states that mentally disabled Stevie is sacrificed for Verloc's bomb attack plans, and this creates an individual tragedy (2015: 1-2). Therefore, individuals with disabilities in the nineteenth century were excluded from society on various levels. Another study demonstrates how the novel portrays the role of women in the late Victorian Age (Zorba, 2011: 237). Therefore, the novel not only focuses on the main political events and male characters, but also on the female perspective through the character Winnie Verloc. Another study that focuses on the novel's historical context and violence and bloodshed is Zengin's "Anarchism and Its Subversion in Joseph Conrad's Secret Agent". This work examines contemporary perspectives on politics and anarchy, as well as the origins of terrorism and violence, in relation to human aspirations (2011: 2-4). Zengin concluded that anarchism, destruction, death, and disasters lead to their recurrence and cause bloodshed, and that only one character, Stevie, could stand against them (2011: 32-33).

As anarchists, some characters in the books already claim their opinions regardless of the outcomes of their actions, which results in death. For example, the Professor is the epitome of an amoral and murderous anarchist in the story. He goes around with a bomb capable of detonation at any moment. This is a state of being ready to die and kill: "My device is the most perfect detonating machine that can be imagined... I carry it always on me" (2007: 42). As an anarchist, he is one of the most dangerous and restless in the story. His words prove his vulgarity and lust for anarchy:

I don't care a hang for your police. I spit on your society. I spit on your laws. I spit on your morality... What do I care for your suffering millions? You are all slaves...

I would see you all dead before I'd let you chain me" (2007: 44)

He has exceeded the limits of humane features and turned into a monster that hates the law, society, and even morality. He sees people as slaves and dumb masses that deserve to die. A second character in this perspective is Comrade Ossipon, who has some ideological justifications for anarchy and violence in politics and society. He is a former medical student who later became an anarchist, fabricating information to justify ideological and political violence. After Stevie's horrific death, he becomes more interested in political issues than in human conditions. His internal monologue reveals a sample: "The lad was blown to pieces.

But what of that? The world had not come to an end” (2007: 198). Michaelis, in the story, is a less extreme character but demonstrates a certain moral distance by writing articles that idealize revolution while ignoring its violent consequences.

Moreover, one of the ex-terrorist characters in the story, Karl Yundt, says, “No pity for anything on earth, including themselves, and death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity – that’s what I would have liked to see” (2007: 34). Likewise, Winnie talks as if anticipating the future unconsciously or as if it never comes to her mind her being the murderer of Verloc; “Some people don’t deserve much mercy” (2007: 48). She would not guess that the corpse she will make is her husband. Parallel to Dickens, Conrad is also brave and eager to show the devilish sides of human nature. So, his treatment of corpses and death is extreme, including other violent, savage acts. The extremism is not the depiction of scenes as Dickens does, but the encouragement of his characters to murder, despite the awful results.

Michaelis, at the beginning of chapter three (2007: 33), blames capitalism for the corpses anarchism produces. In the book, this idea is supported well by other anarchists. Another idea is that Comrade Ossipon thinks that modern men living in their era are already like living corpses. He also attributes economic conditions to what is happening. He believes that the economic conditions are “cannibalistic” in a metaphorical way. That’s what it is! They are nourishing their greed on the quivering flesh and the warm blood of the people” (2007: 41). He has a dream and perception of what is going around; at dark times, Ossipon sees a vision in his mind: “For a moment Ossipon imagined the over-lighted place changed into a dreadful black hole belching horrible fumes, choked with ghastly rubbish of smashed brickwork and mutilated corpses. He had a distinct perception of ruin and death...” (2007: 54). He saw the corpse of humanity and its stink. He is uncomfortable with the scene; however, his response without witnessing these scenes is not the same. Upon reading the explosion of Stevie, Ossipon says:

...Enormous hole in the ground under a tree filled with smashed roots and broken branches. All round fragments of a man’s body blown to pieces. That’s all. The rest’s mere newspaper gup. No doubt a wicked attempt to blow up the Observatory, they say. H’m. That’s hardly credible. (2007: 56-57)

Ossipon takes the matter less seriously without being exposed to it. This scene is one of the most disturbing scenes; a man explodes into pieces. It would certainly be devastating for someone whose loved ones disappeared like that. Police officers collect that with a pair of tweezers. This is what you got inside the coffin at the funeral.

A haunting experience is that of Heats in the story: He is the one who arrives at the scene and investigates it. In the story, he goes to a place where a man is exploded into pieces (2007: 69). He glances over the man’s remains: “What might have been an accumulation of raw material for a cannibal feast,” he says. Although he occasionally witnesses such events, he is unhappy with what he sees. He ponders, “it requires considerable firmness of mind not to recoil before that sight.” Conversely, Conrad draws some characters who seem unaffected by the scenes. An officer who picks up the pieces of flesh utters with “stolid simplicity,” “He’s all there. Every bit of him. It was a job.” This man, I think, represents Conrad’s motivation for

looking at matters in this book. Conrad is like the policeman he depicts. He tells the stories going around with utter professionalism. He tells the story of corpses that were once alive. One is at the bottom of the sea, one exploded, one stabbed, one mutilated, and worse. It is not hard to tell that the world is a world of corpses waiting to be consumed enough to feel nothing, that is, death. Conrad's cannibalistic reasoning continues with Inspector Heat's detailed feelings and imagination. In the context of this novel, the term "cannibalistic" is not literal but figurative or metaphorical: It describes the self-destructive potential of revolutionary movements, the emotional destruction of individuals by the system, and metropolitan life as dehumanizing. Next in the story (2007: 70), Heat thinks about the agony and pain that the mutilated corpse might have suffered during the end of its life: "The shattering violence of destruction which had made of that body a heap of nameless fragments affected his feelings with a sense of ruthless cruelty, though his reason told him the effect must have been as swift as a flash of lightning. The man, whoever he was, had died instantaneously. Yet, it seemed impossible to believe that a human body could have reached that disintegration without passing through the pangs of inconceivable agony." Conrad continues making cannibalistic remarks that the scene was "of a butcher's shop with a view to an inexpensive Sunday dinner."

The most prominent moment when Conrad hits bottom is the announcement of Stevie's horrible death: "Of course. Blown to small bits: limbs, gravel, clothing, bones, splinters—all mixed up together. I tell you they had to fetch a shovel to gather him up with" (2007: 166). Winnie hears it behind the door, her hands covering her face. What a cruel moment for a woman who loses a beloved brother. Conrad underlines the parts of the human body to make it more sensual, imaginable, and realistic for the reader. The word "shovel" is a complementary figure for depicting the scene. Later, Conrad suggests staying perfectly still instead of banging your head against the wall (2007: 168). Soothing someone in this situation should be hard; there are no words to say. However, again, Conrad makes Verloc utter a shocking pragmatic consolation: "Do be reasonable, Winnie. What would it have been if you had lost me?" (2007: 185). These are fictitious characters created by Conrad, though they reflect his imagination in their worldviews. Mr. Verloc even sees cannibalistic hallucinations about Stevie. He does not feel disturbed while eating "the piece of roast beef, laid out in the likeness of funereal baked meats for Stevie's obsequies" (2007: 200). However, losing Stevie, Winnie sees dreams in which the mutilated human parts fly around: "after a rain-like fall of mangled limbs, the decapitated head of Stevie lingered suspended alone, and fading out slowly like the last star of a pyrotechnic display" (2007: 206). Conrad's imagination and metaphors about the human body and cannibalism do not know any boundaries. Of all the writers observed in this paper, Conrad seems the most creative mind by far. His imagination of death and the human body has the features of a cannibal's. How would someone describe blood as such:

Dark drops fell on the floorcloth one after another, with a sound of ticking growing fast and furious like the pulse of an insane clock. At its highest speed this ticking changed into a continuous sound of trickling. Mrs. Verloc watched that transformation with shadows of anxiety coming and going on her face. It was a

trickle, dark, swift, thin... Blood! (2007: 210)

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study argues that the differences in bodily representation correspond not only to literary style but also to historical epistemologies of death. The nineteenth century witnessed sweeping changes in medical discourse, public hygiene, and forensic science, which profoundly influenced how death was perceived, narrated, and documented. The corpse, once a moral symbol, gradually became an object of physiological and forensic scrutiny. Clough still writes partly under the Romantic shadow of reverence and spiritualized grief; Dickens writes amid journalistic modernity and social realism; Conrad writes under the influence of political upheaval, terrorism, and the fragmentation of the modern subject. In examining dead bodies, these authors register an evolving understanding of subjectivity, the body, and the limits of human life. Yet what unites all three writers is their employment of narrative strategies to negotiate the visibility of death. These texts dramatize the question of what should be represented and what should remain unseen. Clough, whose epistolary protagonist avoids looking directly at corpses, constructs a poetics of displacement that registers death indirectly through euphemism and narrative hesitation. Dickens's visual style presents the corpse as a spectacle to be seen, identified, and, at times, moralized through narrative description. Conrad's writing, meanwhile, subjects the body to the modern gaze but emphasizes the horror of fragmentation inherent in modern political violence. Each author thus delineates a different mode of representing the corpse: Clough avoids, Dickens shows, Conrad exposes.

The unwanted in Dickens and Conrad is depicted with fine imaginative details and metaphors. They show us death as it is: cold and still. Conversely, Clough enables Claude to act as an ironic gentleman, someone who has not seen any violence. Clough makes him relive the bloody moments, though he soothes him by skipping the terrible ones and deliberately inducing amnesia. Clough's poetry reflects his preoccupation with life's transience and death's inevitability, often expressed through a subtle and euphemistic narrative style. His works personify the crisis of faith during his time through depictions of corpses and mutilated bodies to explore the dilemma between materiality and spirituality, emphasizing mortality and human margins. In *Amours de Voyage*, Clough contrasts the physicality of death with the intellectual and emotional complexities of his persona, Claude, illustrating his ambivalent response to mortality. Dickens, as a social realist, uses depictions of death and dead bodies to critique societal inequalities and industrialization's dehumanizing effects. Death scenes in his works, such as *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*, underscore class disparities and materialism, with corpses serving as narrative agents that expose secrets and propel the plot. Dickens's portrayals reflect Victorian anxieties about ethics, class, and the treatment of the human body in an unequal society. Conrad's fiction, set during the transitional period between Victorianism and Modernism, explores themes of alienation, imperialism, and moral corruption. His vivid depictions of death and corpses, as in *Heart of Darkness* and *The Secret Agent*, highlight the brutality of colonialism and the chaos of modern political

orders. Conrad's narratives use the dead body as a symbol of personal and collective loss, critiquing the fragility of human constructs and the pervasive violence of imperialistic and cosmopolitan power dynamics.

Araştırma ve yayın etiği beyanı: Bu makale tamamıyla özgün bir araştırma olarak planlanmış, yürütülmüş ve sonuçları ile raporlaştırıldıktan sonra ilgili dergiye gönderilmiştir. Araştırma herhangi bir sempozyum, kongre vb. sunulmamış ya da başka bir dergiye değerlendirilmek üzere gönderilmemiştir.

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